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INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KHARTOUM 000299

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SUBJECT: IN ADVANCE OF ICC DECISION, GOS KEEPS PRESSURE ON DARFUR
NGOS

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) On March 1, the Government of National Unity (GNU) Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) in Khartoum told representatives of CHF International, EedeCans S`ns FrontIeres%Net`erlands (MSF/H), Solidarites, CARE International, MSF/France (MSF/F), and OXFAM International that, for security reasons, the organizations should relocate expatriate (ex-pat) staff temporarily to Khartoum from camps and towns in selected areas of Darfur. However, during a meeting with UN/OCHA March 3, the HAC abruptly changed course and agreed to allow the NGO staff to remain in Nyala and El Fasher. The HAC stressed that this is not an evacuation and staff will soon be allowed to return to their field assignments in Darfur. Separately, IRC had already made a decision to relocate international staff to Khartoum for security reasons due to accusations by the GOS that the IRC provided information to the ICC. However, for the moment IRC continues to implement programs in Darfur. End summary.

CURRENT SITUATION AND GNU HAC DEMANDS

¶2. (SBU) On March 1, the GNU HAC in Khartoum called a meeting with CHF International, MSF/H, Solidarites, CARE International, MSF/F, and OXFAM International. During the meeting, GNU HAC staff advised the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that due to security reasons, the agencies should relocate ex-pat staff temporarily to Khartoum from the following camps and government-held towns in Darfur: Abu Shouk, Gereida, Kalma, Kass, Mornei, Muhajeria, Nertiti, Shearia, Zalingei. According to the GNU HAC, the mandatory relocations had to take place before the International Criminal Court (ICC) announcement scheduled for March 4, and did not apply to local and national staff, just ex-pats. (NOTE: In addition to the seven NGOs called to the GNU HAC meeting, other NGOs operate in the same areas, providing services to affected populations. It remains unknown whether the GNU HAC forgot about the other aid agencies or whether the GNU HAC picked the seven organizations for a more specific reason. Separately, IRC had already made a decision to relocate international staff to Khartoum for security reasons due to accusations by the GOS that the IRC provided information to the ICC. However, for the moment IRC continues to implement programs in Darfur. END NOTE.)

¶3. (SBU) Following the March 1 meeting, the NGOs decided to relocate expat staff to the state capitals rather back to Khartoum; however, on March 2 the GNU HAC Secretary General in South Darfur

and the local head of National Security (NS) advised the NGOs that local authorities could not guarantee security for expat staff in Nyala, South Darfur, and therefore staff should to relocate expats to Khartoum. In addition, local sources reported that the GNU HAC instructions no longer pertained only to the seven NGOs listed above, but was a widespread policy for all NGOs and expat staff in the specified areas of Darfur. As of March 2, USAID staff was uncertain whether the new instructions were a local initiative from GNU HAC South Darfur and NS, or whether the orders were coming from GNU HAC Khartoum.

14. (SBU) On March 3, the Joint Special Representative (JSR) of the African Union-U.N. Joint Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) Rodolphe Adada reported to CDA Fernandez that UNAMID continues to coordinate with Darfur authorities on the potential NGO relocation and NGOs should not be concerned regarding the outcome and the impact on humanitarian programs. In addition, JSR Adada dismissed the idea of the GNU might move against internally displaced person (IDP) camps in the absence of expat NGO staff. SLM Leader Minni Minnawi told CDA on March 3 that, despite assurances from UNAMID, there is widespread uncertainty in IDP camps that the regime could move against them. He noted that SLM/MM controlled camps, such as burgeoning Zamzam outside El Fasher which has been receiving thousands of Zaghawa IDPs from South Darfur, "are ready to defend themselves."

15. (SBU) On March 3, staff from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) met with GNU HAC staff, including Mr. Mutassem and Mr. Salah HAC/NS. During the meeting, the GNU HAC and OCHA representatives agreed to the following measures and GNU HAC staff communicated the information to Mr. Surrur, GNU HAC Commissioner in South Darfur and Mr. MohamedSalih, the South Darfur wali's Director of International Affairs: The NGOs instructed to

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leave 10 locations in Darfur are permitted to relocate staff to Nyala and El Fasher, North Darfur, rather than to Khartoum. The current staff movement is a temporary relocation. (NOTE: Mr. Mutassem insisted that the move is not an evacuation. END NOTE.) and the GNU HAC will reverse the move as soon as possible. The HAC/NS notification for evacuation for international staff of four NGOs in Nyala will be cancelled immediately. (NOTE: Four NGOS received notification on the morning of March 3: CARE, MSF/H, Solidarits, and Samaritan's Purse. END NOTE).

16. (SBU) In addition, GNU HAC Khartoum staff acknowledged the confusion regarding the Nyala information delivery to NGOs and hoped that the March 3 phone call to the GNU HAC Commissioner in South Darfur would prevent any future confusion.

POTENTIAL IMPACT OF A RELOCATION

17. (SBU) If NGOs complete the mandatory relocation, USAID staff note that if there is any humanitarian crisis in the coming days (although we do not expect such a crisis at the time of this writing) our NGO partners would not be properly positioned in the field to provide and coordinate assistance. USAID staff has notified the UN agencies that the US Government will be following the situation closely, including UN efforts to ensure the GNU keeps its promises to allow NGOs to return to the affected area as soon as possible.

WHY RELOCATE? WHY NOW?

18. (SBU) Post is working to gather additional information on the security information that is driving this decision from the GNU HAC. Local and international staff on the ground have speculated that the GNU may be planning a major bombing campaign in the areas being relocated and does not want NGO staff casualties or "eyes and ears" on the ground. Although such plans are merely theories at the moment, this possibility is certainly troubling. By maintaining a staff presence in the camps and affected areas, NGOs provide a significant level of protection and security for the local

populations throughout Darfur. Without NGO staff on the ground, civilians are more vulnerable.

¶9. (SBU) (NOTE: In addition to concerns about a potential GNU attack on the selected areas, humanitarian NGO staff note other possible reasons for the GNU HAC maneuvers to remove expat staff from Darfur, including: GNU authorities might be concerned about local insecurity and do not want responsibilities that may be difficult to meet (protecting international NGO staff); the GNU HAC may also be responding to specific, un-publicized threats against NGO assets and staff; the GNU authorities may see the current moment as an opportunity to further restrict and impede humanitarian activities; local authorities are concerned that the IDPs may use the March 4 announcement to celebrate and such celebrations may trigger official reprisals that the GNU does not want NGO staff to witness; and that perhaps the GNU believes the named NGOs are linked to the ICC. END NOTE)

MEETINGS AND CONVERSATIONS FOR COMING DAYS

¶10. (SBU) Following the GNU HAC meeting and relocation announcements, USAID staff continues to meet with individual implementing partners to assess the overall situation on the ground and GNU HAC responses to partner queries. USAID staff also plan to contact other NGOs working in the targeted areas and surrounding camps to ascertain the additional organizations' current capacity to respond to a potential influx of IDPs should security worsen or displacement continue following the NGO relocation.

COMMENT

¶11. (SBU) The most recent meeting and demands by the GNU HAC follow closely on a steady increase in levels of NGO staff detainment, harassment, interrogation, and asset seizure as the regime

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underscores how reliant the international humanitarian effort in Darfur is on cooperation by Sudanese authorities. For now the humanitarian community can do nothing more but wait and see how things unfold, and if the government is true to its word and allows NGOs back into Darfur once the dust settles on the ICC announcement.

Embassy staff continue to follow the situation closely to ensure NGO staff safety and the continuation of life-saving humanitarian assistance to the people of Darfur.

FERNANDEZ